

Communicative language teaching: The missing link between theory and practice

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Abstract

The general objective of this study was to investigate EFL teachers' implementation experiences of communicative language teaching with reference to selected secondary school EFL teachers in East Wollega Zone, Ethiopia. To achieve the intended objective, descriptive survey research design with mixed approach was employed. Data was collected through questionnaire, classroom observation, interview and textbook analysis. The teachers were selected through availability sampling technique for questionnaire, and randomly for classroom observation and interview. The quantitative data was analyzed by descriptive statistics using SPSS version 20 while the qualitative data was analyzed by narrating the information thematically. Accordingly, it was found out that the teachers rarely implemented communicative language teaching in the EFL classrooms. Opportunities were rarely given for learners to communicate in English language. There was very little interaction between the teachers and the students or among the students themselves in English language. Teaching and learning through lecture was the regular teaching activity in the study area. Teaching was seen as writing note on the blackboard, letting students copy the notes, and explaining the notes with examples. Contrary to this, grades 11 and 12 English language textbooks are designed in a way they engage students in communication. Contextual challenges related to students, teachers, university entrance examination wash back and school context affect the implementation of communicative language teaching. Therefore, it is recommended that EFL teachers should get sufficient training to implement communicative language teaching.

Keywords: communicative language teaching, theory, practice, implementation, contextual challenges

Communicative language teaching: The missing link between theory and practice

1. Introduction

The emergence of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as an English language teaching approach was traced back to the early 1970s when linguists, English language educators and researchers began to question and react against the grammar-based language teaching approaches and methods (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Savignon, 2002). Since its inception, it has served as a major source of influence on English language teaching and learning around the world (Richards, 2006). The introduction of CLT paves ways for English language to be seen not only structurally but also communicatively. Thus, the goal of the approach is to develop learners' communicative competence which means to make learners capable users of English language in different contexts appropriately (Larsen-Freeman, 2000 & Richards, 2006).

Similarly, Ethiopia introduced a CLT-based Education and Training Policy in 1994 hoping to improve English language teaching practice in general and learners' communicative competence in particular. Following the policy, secondary school English language textbooks have been revised and improved in a way they engage learners in communication. The textbooks have been developed by considering various activities to be done individually, in pairs and groups by giving fairly equal emphasis to all language skills. To support this claim, Alemu (2004) states that each unit in the secondary school textbooks is organized around a topic (theme) covering reading, vocabulary, grammar, speaking, listening and writing sections as communicatively as possible. The activities in the textbooks are designed in a way they engage students in communication.

However, although the CLT-based ELT curriculum was introduced almost 25 years ago in Ethiopian context, some researches showed that the EFL teachers still teach English language traditionally (Adinew, 2015; Birhanu, 2012; Haregewain, 2008 & Tadesse, 2008). Various classroom observations of the current researcher and colleagues have also shown that there is still a gap between what is intended at policy level and what is achieved in the real classroom. Teaching English is still viewed as making students silent and telling them about the lessons by standing in front of them. The teachers' role is to impart knowledge to their students. The teachers consider themselves as the sources of knowledge. As a result, learners' English language performance in general and communicative competence in particular is decreasing from time to time. Regarding this, Alemu (2004) and Haregewain (2008) concluded that there is no significant improvement in the learners' communicative competence even after the inception of CLT-based textbooks.

Teachers' failure to properly implement CLT in EFL classrooms is attributed to various factors. One of the major factors that hinder the implementation of CLT is teachers' cognition which means what teachers know, think and believe about CLT. The EFL teachers in particular lack the necessary knowledge and skills for the application of communicative language teaching (Ali & Walker, 2014). They have inconsistent cognition about CLT, its goals, principles, methods and applications in the classroom. Besides, Chang and Goswami (2011) and Hampshire and Burns (2015) argue that teachers in most parts of the world are still unable to implement CLT because of their commitment to teacher-centered language teaching methods.

In a similar fashion, most teachers in Ethiopian secondary schools still seem to use the teacher-centered teaching methods because of some challenges (Amare, 2017; Daniel, 2010; Deneke, 2009 & Haregewain, 2008). The paradigm shift has been brought only on the teaching materials (textbooks), but not on the teachers who are supposed to implement the textbooks. For example, EFL teachers in the study area usually show demand of in-service trainings with regard to their current teaching practices. This tells us that there is a gap in the teachers' knowledge and skills of implementing the CLT-based textbooks. It seems that emphasis is not given to what teachers think, know, believe and do about EFL teaching and learning. Therefore, based on this premise, the following research questions need to be addressed.

- Do secondary school EFL teachers implement communicative language teaching in line with the contents/activities that are presented in the students' textbooks?
- What are the contextual challenges that hinder the implementation of communicative language teaching?

2. Materials and Methods

The Research Design - Once the specific research objectives are set, and the research variables are operationalized, the next stage is to plan a suitable research design. Thus, this study employed descriptive survey research design because it is used when the study is related to teachers' teaching behaviors like classroom implementation (Ary et al., 2010; Black, 2002 & Creswell, 2012). It describes the procedures for conducting the study, including when, from whom and under what conditions data is collected, analyzed and interpreted. Its purpose is to provide the most valid and accurate answers to the research questions. Therefore, the researcher described the secondary school teachers' implementation practice of communicative language teaching at the time of study. Besides, survey is commonly used when research participants are selected randomly like that of the present study because random sampling is unbiased and it reduces sampling errors (Creswell, 2012). The present study also sampled secondary school EFL teachers randomly from the given population so that the result obtained using the sample is generalized back to the population.

The Research Approach - This research employed mixed research approach to provide better understanding of the research problem. Both quantitative and qualitative data was used to investigate EFL teachers' implementation experiences of communicative language teaching and the challenges they face to implement the approach. Description in words for the qualitative data adds meaning to the use of numbers, and numbers add precision to the descriptions in words. Therefore, the mixed research approach provides strong evidence for the conclusion of the study. An explanatory mixed method was used to collect and analyze data. This means, quantitative data was collected through questionnaire, and then analyzed using descriptive statistics. The rationale for collecting and analyzing the quantitative data first is to provide a general picture of the problem under study. Then, qualitative data was collected through classroom observation, semi-structured interview and textbook analysis, and analyzed thematically to triangulate, validate and refine the result obtained through the quantitative data. Finally, results from both approaches were compared, contrasted and interpreted.

Selection of the Research Sites - Seven secondary schools in East Wollega Zone, Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia, were the sites of the study. The sites were selected for two main reasons. The first reason is that feedback that had been collected from the secondary school EFL teachers in the area during community service engagements, classroom observations and informal blames from colleagues indicated that the teachers need professional intervention in the area of the implementation of CLT. Therefore, the current researcher decides to conduct research in the area to identify the problem, and organize training at least to minimize the problem. The second reason is that the zone is one of the catchment areas of Wollega University for which the university is working for the wellbeing of the societies in various sectors out of which education is the major one. The seven secondary schools included in the study were: Arjo, Ayana, Kokofe, KIRAMU, Nunu, Sasiga and Ukke.

Participants of the Study - The participants of the study were secondary school EFL teachers who were teaching grades 11 and 12 in the East Wollega Zonal Administration, Ethiopia. The total of 58 EFL teachers took part in the survey of the study. Accordingly, 53 of the teachers were males and 5 of them were females. All of the teachers were majoring English language. With respect to their qualifications, 27 of them were M.A. degree holders in TEFL while 31 of them were B.A holders in English Language. Majority of them had the teaching experiences of 21-30 years. Twelve teachers from the 58 teachers were observed and interviewed.

Sampling Techniques - The seven secondary schools mentioned before were selected randomly for the study. The EFL teachers in the selected secondary schools were included in the study based on availability sampling technique. Only available teachers during the time of the distribution of the questionnaire were

included in the study. Four secondary schools out of the seven secondary schools namely Ayana, KIRAMU, Sasiga and Ukke were selected randomly for classroom observation. Three EFL teachers from each secondary school (total of 12 teachers from the four secondary schools) were selected randomly for classroom observation and interview.

Instruments of Data Collection - The way a researcher asks the basic research questions often determines the type of data collection instruments to be used (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Thus, questionnaire, classroom observation, semi-structured interview and textbook analysis were used as instruments of data collection. Both close-ended and open-ended questionnaire were adapted from questionnaires that were developed by Chang (2011), Karava-Doukas (1996), Leal (2014), Manzano (2015), Ozsevik (2010), Razmjoo and Riazi (2006), Tootkaboni (2019) and other related literature. Open-ended items were added to get additional data than the researcher might not consider in close-ended ones. Out of the 61 questionnaires distributed, 58 of them were returned to the researcher. Then, the responses were fed to SPSS version 20 for analysis. To enhance validity, the items were linked to the objectives of the study, and to check the reliability, internal consistency was calculated by using Cronbach Alpha. As a result, the reliability coefficient was 0.86 which means the items were consistent.

Classroom observation was also used to gather data on the teachers' implementation of communicative language teaching. The current researcher observed the extent to which the EFL teachers implemented communicative language teaching based on its basic principles, and some of the observable challenges they faced while trying to implement it. The observation was held after getting the questionnaire filled. A total of 12 EFL teachers in the four secondary schools mentioned before were observed three times, and the observations were audio-recorded. A semi-structured interview was also used with sample observed EFL teachers to get data regarding their classroom implementation of communicative language teaching, and the potential challenges that hindered the teachers' implementation of it. The interview was one-to-one because it was believed that each teacher might not expose information related to his/her implementation practice inside the group of people like that of FGD. The interview was held in school compound by arranging suitable time with each teacher. It lasted for 25-35 minutes with each interviewee and it was audio-recorded. Textbook analysis was also used to check whether the contents were presented as the teachers implement or not.

Data Analysis Techniques - The nature of data to be collected implies the way it is to be analyzed and interpreted (Dawson, 2007 & Walliman, 2011). Accordingly, the data collected through questionnaire was analyzed through descriptive statistics while the data obtained through classroom observation, semi-structured interview and textbook analysis was narrated and analyzed thematically. The results of the previous studies were also compared and contrasted with the result of the current study to see to what extent the current study was similar or different with the related studies. Finally, in order to draw reliable and valid conclusions, the data collected through all instruments were compared, contrasted, triangulated and concluded.

Ethical Considerations of the Study - Researches that involve human participants usually need ethical considerations (Ary et al., 2010). For this reason, ethical issues with regard to the present study were also considered. At the start, the sample secondary schools were contacted by obtaining official letter from Wollega University (sponsoring university). Then, the EFL teachers in the secondary schools were informed about the objectives and significances of the study. Before any data collection process started, the consents of the EFL teachers were asked and then agreed. The data the EFL teachers provided was kept confidential with honesty and respect and was reported anonymously. The original data was not changed or misinterpreted to satisfy certain predictions of the present researcher. Finally, to maintain academic honesty and integrity, all the sources used in the study were acknowledged.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1 EFL Teachers' Implementation of Communicative Language Teaching

The first research question of this study is, "Do secondary school EFL teachers implement communicative language teaching in line with the contents/activities that are presented in the students' textbooks?" The purpose of this question is primarily to examine the extent to which the secondary school EFL teachers implement communicative language teaching in English classrooms. Classroom observation, semi-structured interview and textbook analysis were used to answer the research question.

A total of 24 observation sessions were conducted to identify whether EFL teachers implement communicative language teaching as the contents and activities are presented in the students' textbooks or not. The observation result proved that it was habitual that teacher centered teaching methods dominated the EFL classrooms. There was very little interaction between the teachers and the students and among the students themselves in English language classrooms. Most of the observed sessions lacked meaningful interaction and communication in English language. Classroom teaching and learning was mostly dominated by teacher writing of notes and followed by explaining the notes. The students were rarely given opportunities to communicate in English language. They were not involved in communicative activities. Very little attempt was made by the EFL teachers to involve students in communication.

For example, one teacher was observed while he was teaching the topic entitled, "*The present perfect tense.*" He began the lesson by writing the form of present perfect tense as S + has/have + v₃. Then, he continued writing the uses of the present perfect tense with some examples followed by brief explanations of the notes line by line. Next, he wrote an activity, which instructed the students to complete the sentences with correct verb forms. After the students finished writing, the teacher concluded the day's lesson by completing the sentences by himself.

Contrary to the above result, the textbook is designed so as to engage students in communication. After the day's observation session was over, the current researcher went to the textbook and checked whether things are presented in the textbook in line with the teachers' presentation or not. Although the teacher began the lesson by writing the form of present perfect tense, the textbook starts the lesson by asking the students to interview each other using expressions like: *have you...., how long have you...., where have you been.....what have you done....etc.* The textbook presents the lesson inductively in a way the students interact with each other and with their teacher. However, the teacher made the lesson deductive by beginning with the rules. Thus, there was a mismatch between what is intended and what is practiced in English language classroom.

Another teacher was also observed while he was teaching Unit 9 of grade 11, which says, "*Disability.*" The teacher began the unit by defining disability and telling the students that disability is not an obstacle for success. He told the success of Helen Keller, the blind and deaf woman, to his students in Afan Oromo (the learners' mother tongue). After that he wrote many words that are related to disability like *amputation, autism, deafness, paralysis*, etc. with their definitions, and explained them. However, when the presentation of the topic was revisited from the textbook on page 221 by the current researcher, there was a mismatch between the way the teacher presented the lesson and the way it appears in the textbook. The textbook begins the topic by requesting the students with brainstorming questions like: *What is disability? Do you know or have you met any disabled person? Is loss of sight means loss of vision?* These questions are helpful to engage students in communication, but the teacher jumped over them. Besides, the textbook orders the students to write one argumentative paragraph on, "*Disability is a life sentence*" before it moves to the vocabulary that the teacher wrote on the board. This activity is also meant to engage students in written communication, but the teacher overlooked it and dealt with the vocabulary section. Therefore, the teacher preferred lecture to engaging students in communication.

Similarly, another teacher was observed in grade 11 while he was teaching “*Sequencing words and expressions.*” The lesson was all about linking words and expressions. The teacher started the day’s lesson by writing notes on linking words of chronological order and time sequence with some examples. After he had finished explaining the notes, he wrote the exercise that commands the students to join pairs of sentences together using correct linking words of their own. Then, the teacher ended the day’s lesson by answering some of the exercises by his own.

Contrary to the teachers’ lesson presentation, which was began with notes, the textbook presents the lesson (page 149) by requesting the teacher to read a story for students so that they listen to the story and identify sequencing expressions and words used in it. After that, the textbook asks the students to describe the things they have done so far keeping its time sequence. Then, the exercise that the teacher wrote on the blackboard comes. This shows that the teacher jumped over the listening text that is meant to engage students in identifying the linking words used in the story. He also did not engage the students to describe the things they have done so far. The teacher modified the topic in a way it fitted lecture rather than helping the students to practice communication.

The teachers were interviewed in detail why there was a mismatch between the intention of the textbooks and the teachers’ practices in the English classrooms. The teachers admitted that although there are activities that are provided in the textbooks like brainstorming, expressing opinions, writing paragraphs, guessing words from context, individual presentations, role plays, reading comprehensions, and others, there were various problems that hindered the teachers not to implement the activities in the textbooks accordingly. To support this, one teacher stated as:

To be frank, I do not give activities for my students according to written in the textbooks. In the textbooks, there are many activities like role play, pair work, brainstorming, asking and answering questions, agreeing and disagreeing, expressing opinions etc. However, you know today’s students. They do not know English language. They are very afraid to speak English by standing in front of me and classmates.

The above excerpt reveals that the teacher did not give the activities in the textbooks to his students so as to engage them in communication. The main reason why he did not implement the activities was because of problems related to students. He argued that the students’ English language performances were limited. Another teacher also supplemented the idea by expressing as, “No, I give most of the activities based on grammar. Students do not like home works or class works of speaking, reading or writing. They try only grammar.” This teacher also agreed that he did not implement the listening, speaking, reading and writing activities as they are intended in the textbooks because his students were reluctant to engage themselves in communication as actively as possible. Still, another EFL teacher expressed that:

Giving activities in group? I do not want to lie. I do not give group works. Especially this year we teach students in shifts because of Covid-19 case. Students to learn three days by a week. We busy ourselves to finish textbook by time. We have to finish textbook before the entrance examination. If the situations are normal, I use group work. At that time my role is guiding the students, and controlling the group activities. Students should follow actively by practicing every activity by speaking, listening.

The above teacher argued that he did not organize his students in groups and give them tasks to do. The primary reason that the teacher stated as a hindrance for the implementation of group work was because of shortage of time because of Covid-19 epidemic. Some teachers also expressed their feelings that they did not implement group activities because grade 11 English language textbook in particular is too large to finish within the given time. They said that they frequently use lecture method to finish every chapter of the textbook.

Generally, the result was evident that the practical implementation of communicative language teaching in

the study area was far from the intended goal. It was not realized at the level it was intended by the national policy of ELT curriculum. The Ethiopian Education and Training Policy of the 1994 states that active and communicative language teaching/learning is to be boosted because it develops learners' communicative competence, critical thinking skills and problem-solving skills. However, there is still teacher-dominated teaching and learning pedagogy is the custom in the secondary schools. Teaching is viewed as telling, presenting or explaining the content under discussion. There is little application of communicative language teaching at secondary schools.

3.2 Contextual Challenges that hinder the Implementation of CLT

The following table summarizes the EFL teachers' responses in relation to the contextual challenges that hinder the implementation of communicative language teaching.

Table 1

EFL teachers' responses to the challenges of CLT implementation

Themes (Constructs)	Cases	Items	Min.	Max.	M	SD
EFL teacher-related challenges	58	7	13	30	23.55	4.42
Student-related challenges	58	4	12	18	15.47	2.19
School context-related challenges	58	4	7	19	14.22	3.13
Exam wash back-related challenges	58	4	9	20	15.57	3.10

According to the responses shown in the above table, one of the challenges that hindered the EFL teachers' implementation of communicative language teaching was related to the teachers themselves. The grand mean of the seven items was 23.55 which mean the response rate was greater than the mid-point (average score). The teachers agreed that there was lack of in-service training and continuous development about the implementation of communicative language teaching. There was lack of consistent understanding about the theory and application of communicative language teaching. As a result, the teachers preferred teacher-centered teaching methods like lecture to that of communicative language teaching. The EFL teachers in the study area were influenced by behaviorist theory of teaching and learning where they considered themselves as sources of knowledge and their roles were to tell, present and explain the language items to their students.

The result of the semi-structured interview also showed that teachers' misconception about communicative language teaching hampered its implementation in the classroom. It was found out that secondary school EFL teachers under study conceptualized communicative language teaching as the teaching of only speaking skills. They associated communication with that of oral speech. According to their conceptualization, since speaking skill is not assessed in university entrance examination, both the teachers and the students skipped over the skill and dealt with what are believed to be assessed on the examination like grammar, vocabulary and some reading comprehensions. In support of this idea, one teacher stated:

I do not implement communicative language teaching according to the activities in textbook. These days, what matters for education office, directors, students or parents are the good results that students score. That means it is not how much they have learnt to communicate in English language. It is senseless unless students score good grades to join university. If many students fail in entrance examination, I will be demoted to lower grades. I will not get things like invigilating matriculation or further education.

The above extract is evident that The EFL teachers taught what is assessed in the university entrance examination rather than teaching what is necessary to improve their students' communicative competence. The teachers focused on grammar language items, vocabulary and some reading comprehensions, but they gave less or no emphasis for other language skills like speaking, listening and writing. The teachers' responsibility was to equip and prepare their students for university entrance examination, which is prepared in the form of multiple choice question items than to equip them for communication in different real life contexts. Another teacher also

strengthened the idea by saying:

I do not teach my students in communication because speaking and listening skills do not come on entrance examination. I teach my students based on to make them ready for entrance examination. If my students score good marks, I am behind them that it means. I am as a model teacher. Everybody is appreciating me at that time. But if students fail, the teacher is seen as fruitless or lazy.

The above teacher confirmed that he did not implement communicative language teaching because he emphasized teaching the language items that repeatedly appear on university entrance examinations, and that make his students succeed in the examination. The teachers' teaching practice was influenced by the way the Ethiopian university entrance examination is prepared. It seems there is a mismatch between the objectives of the textbooks and the university entrance examinations. The Ethiopian English language textbooks (grades 11 and 12 in focus) gives fairly equal sharing for all skills. However, speaking, listening and writing skills are not assessed in the entrance examination although they are emphasized in the textbooks. The teachers argued that they skipped over these skills because the key question that today's parents, teachers and school administrators ask is not the question of to what extent the students' communicative competence is developed, but how much the students score on the examinations. Nevertheless, success in English language teaching/learning means more than just passing the university entrance examination. It involves using the language in every day contexts effectively and appropriately. The principles of communicative language teaching apply fairly equally to all language skills regardless of the assessment format of one's country.

The teachers under study believed that the heart of English language teaching and learning is grammar, and mastering grammar rules means mastering the language. This shows that the teachers missed the necessary theoretical and practical knowledge and skill of communicative language teaching. However, according to the principle of communicative language teaching, functional aspects of English language teaching/learning is also given importance to promote communication. It does not mean that communicative language teaching approach undermines or denies the importance of teaching grammar, but it believes that grammar is taught or learnt implicitly and inductively so that learners make the rules by themselves at the end of the lesson.

Problems related to learners were other hindrance for the implementation of communicative language teaching. Accordingly, the teachers were asked whether the challenges were related to their learners or not. The result in Table 1 showed that the grand mean score of 15.47 (near to agree). There were some learner-related factors that stuck the implementation of communicative language teaching. Learners were poor at English language; as a result, they resisted participating actively in English classrooms. The learners preferred to use their mother tongue to English language in trying to communicate English activities. Besides, they viewed learning as sitting down and taking notes and listening to teachers' talk. This made the teachers overlook the implementation of communicative language teaching. Regarding this, one teacher stated the following idea during the interview:

Yes, students do not try to communication in English language. When I ask my students to communication English activities in classroom like conversation and dialogue, they are silent. Also when I ask them when they have any question, no one ask me a question. Some of the students are afraid to ask, but others are careless. When I ask them to try English language presentation, they say "I come to learn from you; not to teach you." The students are not willing in communicative activities. They lack confidence to speak.

The teacher strongly suggested that the students' background knowledge and their proficiency of English language was another challenge. Students' background knowledge was poor at English language, and because of this they resisted taking part in classroom discussions as actively as possible. The students lacked fluency in English language, which was the cause for their fear and anxiety to take part in English language discussion and communication. The students also viewed teaching and learning as receiving knowledge from their teachers.

They believe teachers as sources of knowledge.

The teachers were also asked whether the context of the school, where teaching and learning takes place, affected the implementations of communicative language teaching or not. Thus, the mean score of the respondents was computed to be 14.22, which is greater than the average mean score (mid-point). This shows that school context related factors like teaching facilities (reference books, audios, videos), and physical conditions of the classrooms (students' seats) affected the implementations of communicative language teaching. In short, lack of access to educational resources played a key role in hindering the implementation of communicative language teaching.

Some of the interviewed EFL teachers also indicated that the school context in which they were teaching affected the degree of the implementations of communicative language teaching. For example, the teachers indicated that there was lack of students' textbooks in some secondary schools, which was a serious problem to help students practice reading comprehension activities in particular. In support of this claim, one teacher expressed, "There are lack of learning materials like textbooks. There are less than 10 textbooks for students in one classroom. There is lack of reference materials. There are no recorded materials to teach English listening skills." It is clear that shortage of textbooks, reference materials, and authentic materials like videos and audios could hamper the implementations of communicative language teaching in general and students' engagement in learning in particular. Besides, the teachers stressed that they were urged to teach more than 30 periods per week. Thus, they were rushing to cover the contents in the textbooks than to give activities to students to practice. Lecturing students helped them finish or cover the textbooks on time.

As discussed before, the EFL teachers were asked whether the wash back effect of the university entrance examination affected the implementation of communicative language teaching or not. As a result, the grand mean of the responses was 15.57, which mean near to agree. The teachers responded that they taught their students in a way they succeeded in passing university entrance examination than in a way they developed their communicative skills. They examined their students based on their knowledge of grammar rules and vocabulary. There is a mismatch between what the textbooks intend and what is assessed through the examination. The nature and contents of the university entrance examination affected the teachers' instructional methods and the students' learning preferences. The Ethiopian university entrance examination components are mainly based on grammar, vocabulary and reading comprehension although the textbook gives fairly equal shares for all language skills.

Another challenge that was not considered in close-ended question, but pointed out through open-ended question items by the teachers was related to CLT itself. Some teachers argued that communicative language teaching works only for learners who use English as a mother tongue or as a second language. However, in their schools' context, there is lack of chance of practicing English outside the class as there is no model English language speakers around the learners. The students have no exposure to English language in the environment where they live, which is one of the obstacles for the development of their communicative competence. With regard to this argument, one teacher has the following to say:

One big problem to apply communicative language teaching is students do not have chance to speak English language in the society. If students have chance to practice with their family or if students are from educated family, they can communicate effectively. However, since English is the foreign language, they communicate only in the classroom for few minutes. This is really a problem. Therefore, students have shortage of English language to try. They are very afraid.

This shows that some secondary school EFL teachers had doubt on the practical implementation of communicative language teaching in their context. The implementation of communicative language teaching was in a problem because students practiced English language only in the classroom. There is no chance of using and communicating the language outside the classroom. Of course, this is true in Ethiopian context. However, the students should bring outside contents in the society to the classroom and learn English. The teacher should

adapt indigenous educational values and traditions in the society in line with the principles and assumptions of communicative language teaching and teach their students. The teachers are expected to contextualize the contents in to their own specific teaching context and culture.

4. Discussions

The result of the study showed that communicative language teaching was not implemented in English classrooms of the study area. The EFL teachers created rare opportunities for their students to communicate in English language with each other or with their teachers themselves. The classroom observations in particular practically proved that there was lack of interaction and communication in the classrooms in English language. Individual, pair or group activities were rarely given, and there was less chance created for the students to communicate, cooperate and practice English language with each other and with their teachers. The students were not given tasks to contribute their knowledge to teaching and learning in the classrooms. There was a massive tendency from the EFL teachers to teach through teacher centered methods.

It seems there was a mismatch between the intention of the textbooks and the teachers' teaching practices in the classrooms. The textbooks are designed communicatively by giving fairly equal shares for all language skills. The Ethiopian secondary school English language textbooks (grades 11 and 12 in focus) are designed in a way they engage students in communication. The lessons are presented inductively in a way they develop students' communicative skills, problem solving skills, critical thinking skills, interpersonal skills and social skills. A number of activities that invite learners to communicate are provided under each and every language skill.

However, the teachers lectured grammar and vocabulary language items that they thought to appear on university entrance examinations. It looks as if the goal of teaching English language is changed from developing students' communicative competence to obtaining high scores in university entrance examinations. The practical implementation of communicative language teaching was not realized at the level it was intended by the national policy of ELT curriculum of Ethiopia. It is the exam wash back that determines about teaching and learning English language in general. Yet, the goal of communicative language teaching is primarily to develop learners' communicative competence. In support of this, Leal (2014) and Roy (2016) emphasized that implementing communicative language teaching means engaging students practically and meaningfully in communication to develop their communicative competence.

It was also found out that there were contextual challenges that hindered the EFL teachers' implementation of communicative language teaching. The challenges were categorized in to five major areas. The first and most serious problem that the EFL teachers reported repeatedly was related to learners. The teachers hinted that their students were poor at English language. Their background and proficiency at the language was very low. Because of this, they either wanted to practice the activities in Afan Oromo (their mother tongue) or they were not willing to communicate in English language at all. This finding is in agreement with the finding obtained by Alemu (2004) which stated that learners' insufficient English language proficiency hampered the implementation of communicative language teaching.

The second contextual challenge that hindered the EFL teachers not to properly implement communicative language teaching was related to the wash back effects of university entrance examination, which is given at the end of grade 12. The nature and contents of the university entrance examination in Ethiopia affected the teachers' instructional methods and the students' learning preferences. The contents of the examination are mainly based on grammar, vocabulary and reading comprehension although the textbooks give fairly equal shares for all language skills. Thus, the teachers inclined to the teaching/learning of those items that frequently appear on the examination. Similarly, students' success was measured based on their examination results; not based on the communicative skills they were intended to develop. Therefore, it seems there is a mismatch between what the textbooks intend to develop and what is assessed through the examination. To support this finding, Tadesse (2008) argued that the examination system of Ethiopia remained one of the biggest challenges that hindered the

implementation of CLT in the classrooms.

In spite of the contents of the university entrance examination, the textbooks give fairly equal emphasis to all English language skills. The university entrance examination covers mainly grammar, vocabulary and some reading comprehensions at the expenses of the other skills like listening, speaking and writing. This influenced the EFL teachers to give less emphasis for speaking, listening and writing skills in EFL classrooms. The findings of Hamid and Baldauf (2008) and Ansarey (2012) showed that university entrance examination in Bangladesh lack communicativeness, and the wash back effects of the grammar-based examination affected the teaching, learning and study experiences of the learners. On the other hand, the current researcher argues that success in English language teaching/learning in general and that of communicative language teaching in particular is more than just passing a university entrance examination. It is rather using English language in different and every day contexts effectively and appropriately. This is why the Ethiopian English language textbooks are designed in such a way.

The third contextual challenge was related to the EFL teachers themselves. The teachers lacked comprehensive understanding about the notion and application of communicative language teaching. The teachers understood CLT as the teaching/learning of only oral or speaking skills. Since the teachers believed that speaking skill is not practically assessed in university entrance examination, they skipped over it and dealt with what are believed to appear on the examination like grammar and vocabulary. The teachers were also habituated to the teacher centered teaching methods rather than engaging learners in actual communication in English classrooms. Lecture was viewed as the working regular teaching culture of the teachers. The above finding was in agreement with the findings obtained by Chang and Goswami (2011) and Hampshire and Burns (2015) who concluded that CLT was not properly implemented in the EFL classrooms because of teachers' lack of proper understanding about it. They found out that most EFL teachers that taught English language as a foreign language were unable to implement communicative language teaching because of their imprecise cognition about the goals and principles the approach.

For the above matters, the current researcher argues that due attention should be given to EFL teachers' cognition and professional developments in relation to communicative language teaching because they are the key assets in the implementations of the textbooks in EFL classrooms where students have almost no chance to use the language outside the classroom. Therefore, the EFL teachers should get continuous in-service developments and trainings in relation to the theoretical and practical application of communicative language teaching.

The fourth factor was related to the school context where EFL teachers teach. The most serious problem that most teachers indicated was lack of enough textbooks. Most of the teachers indicated that their schools had no sufficient textbooks; as a result, they were facing problems to teach reading comprehension in particular. It was reported that few of the textbooks were kept in library; not at the hands of the students. The classroom observations also showed that almost all of the students were in the classroom without having textbooks. There was lack of authentic and supplementary teaching/learning sources like reference books, audios, videos and internet so as to facilitate the implementation of communicative language teaching. In support of this finding, Borg (2003) and Harmer (2003) state that insufficiency of school facilities like textbooks, language improvement centers, audios and videos affect the implementation of communicative language teaching.

The fifth challenge to implement communicative language teaching as the view of some EFL teachers was related to the CLT itself. The EFL teachers argued that CLT is not practically implemented in their context where teachers and students try to use English language only in classroom setting. There is no opportunity for students to use the language outside the classroom in different contexts appropriately. The students have no exposure to English language in the environment where they live, which is one of the obstacles for their poor English language performances.

It is because of this reason that the current researcher argues that due attention must be given to teachers'

cognition aspects of CLT. If EFL teachers have comprehensive cognition about CLT in general, they will bring local and indigenous values in the society into the EFL classrooms so that the students are more interested to learn the local contents and use English language as a medium to communicate the contents. Besides, when the EFL teachers' cognition is developed, they adapt, contextualize and localize the teaching/learning materials based on the principles of CLT and needs of students into their own specific teaching contexts and localities rather than accepting teaching materials that are designed and developed at ministry of education level as a final teaching/learning material. Regarding this finding, Bax (2003) and Kumaravadivelu (2006) recommend that due attention needs to be given to English language teachers' cognition of communicative language teaching. When the teachers' cognitive aspects are developed, they can adapt and prepare their context-sensitive activities based on the theory of CLT.

5. Conclusions and Implications

The education and training policy of Ethiopia states that English language is to be taught according to the basic principles of communicative language teaching. In line with the policy, the secondary school textbooks (grades 11 and 12 in focus) are designed in the way they engage learners in communication. However, the result of the study was evident that the practical implementation of communicative language teaching was far from the intended goal. It was not realized at the level it was intended by the national policy of ELT curriculum. The Ethiopian Education and Training Policy of the 1994 states that active and communicative language teaching/learning is to be boosted because it develops learners' communicative competence, critical thinking skills and problem-solving skills. Contrary to this, there is still teacher-dominated teaching and learning pedagogy is the custom in the secondary schools. Teaching is viewed as telling, presenting or explaining the contents. EFL teachers rarely engage learners in communication. Therefore, there is a missing link between the theory and the classroom implementation.

The findings of the study give some theoretical and practical implications for EFL teachers, students, EFL teacher educators and textbook writers. The study suggests that secondary school EFL teachers need theoretical and practical awareness-raising training about CLT to make the EFL classrooms communicative and interactive. This contributes to effective teaching/learning of the language, and students' performances as well. English language teacher educators should also plan and execute pre-service and in-service educations in terms of the basic principle of CLT. They are recommended to provide EFL teachers with opportunities to link theory and practice. The study is also implied for syllabus designers and textbook writers. They ought to consider EFL teachers' as a driving force for ELT curriculum design, revision, innovation and implementation. They should involve teachers' voices in the process of textbook preparations.

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